

Gábor Kovács, PhD:
Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of Philosophy,
Research Centre for Humanities,
Hungarian Academy of Sciences,
Budapest, Hungary

HOW TO CREATE A NATION?

VISUALISATIONS OF COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS FROM THE PREMODERN TIMES TO THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

/Submitted version, accepted without substantial change In: Creativity

Studies, 7:1, 46-54, DOI: 10.3846/20297475.2014.927806 (To link to this article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3846/20297475.2014.927806/>)

National consciousness, under modern circumstances, takes shape as a picture of a territorial unity, encircled by a contiguous red borderline on the political map, in social imaginary. The map delineating a portion of a geographical territory fenced off from other territories is a typical modern pictorial representation of national community. Modern nation, as it has been described by Benedict Anderson in his seminal book, is an imagined community. Visual imagination construing mental pictures of respective community, of course, was alive in archaic times but the pictorial representation of community was personified; it was embodied in rulers. The geographical image of a political unit was indistinct. What happens to the modern mental image of nation as a territorial unit in the age of globalization? It was a widely shared conviction, in the enthusiastic mood of the 1990s, according to which the image of Net was going to prevail the image of territory in national fancy. Having seen the events of the latest decade this optimism seems to be hasty; a hybrid mental image of nation has been emerging in national consciousness blending archaic, modern and postmodern elements.

Keywords: globalization, imagined community, map, nation, national consciousness.

Introduction

In the decade before millennium such terms as “nation” and “national consciousness” seemed to be categories doomed to throw onto the garbage heap of history. Francis Fukuyama’s prophesy, rooted in the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, prognosticated the end of history and with it the

disintegration of nation-state. The progress of globalization was perceived as an irresistible natural force dissolving the accustomed forms and frameworks of human life. There was a widely shared conviction concerning the inevitability of a global arrangement supplying new organizational forms for human communities. It was said that old types of communal allegiances, first of all national consciousness, would lose their importance. It happened the other way around; nation and national consciousness proved much more persistent than it had been supposed.

Theories about the genesis of the nation

The problem lends itself to a historical approach; the interpretation needs the exposition of the historical roots of the investigated phenomenon. The applied method of this paper is a historical analysis putting in the framework of the history of political ideas.

The question of national consciousness entails another one: it is the idea of nation which is a focal point of debates among historians, sociologists and philosophers. Voluminous special literature has been produced about this problem in last decades. As a working definition, nation is a special kind of human communities exceeding in size and structural complexity family, the elementary type of human coexistence, as well as the larger and more complex units, clan or tribe based on kinship. But when it comes to a more restricted definition and the genesis of the nation, we find ourselves in the middle of hot scholarly debates. An overall review about the theories presented in this field is far beyond the scope of this paper. However, following Anthony D. Smith, we can distinguish three types of theories concerning the making of nations (Smith 1983).

According to the protagonists of *perennialist theories* nation has been an organic entity, a “natural” unit of wide range human coexistence since archaic, premodern times. This approach, for the time being, is in a minority position because *modernist theories* dominate the scientific arena. Nation, according to them, is an exclusive phenomenon of modernity; it is a response to the economic challenges posed by modernity. One of the most renowned protagonists of modernist theory is Ernest Gellner who deduces the emerging of nation and its state from the requirements of modern capitalistic economy for homogenous social and cultural environment and mobile work force. It is, in the theory of Karl Deutsch, the modern means of communications which proved indispensable for rising of the nation, while, according to Eric Hobsbawm, it was a consequence, on the one hand, of French Revolution in 1789 and the Industrial Revolution, on the other hand. Nation, in the theory of Elie Kedourie, is a historic product of nationalism aiming at the calling into being this kind of human

community. It was the modern intelligentsia armed by the philosophical ideas of Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel who was the main driving force of the nation-building. The protagonists of symbolic theory try to synthesize the aforementioned perennialist and modernist approach. Nations, they argue, are the phenomena of modernity but they are rooted in premodern traditions, mainly in religious-mythical symbols which are the crystallization points for the community consciousness of archaic, ethnically based communities, and as such they are the antecedents for modern national consciousness. Main representatives of this approach are John Amstrong, Fredrik Barth and Smith.

The imagined community and the rise of modernity

Anderson, whose concept is vital important for the subject of this paper, in his seminal book entitled *Imagined communities* construed a very impressive variant of modernist theories; he applied a cultural anthropological approach for the problem of the genesis of nation. The very basis of his concept that every community which exceeds a size above which a face to face communication is no more possible among the members of this community is inevitably an imagined community. This means that the community members, who are not in face to face contact with each other any more, construct an imagined community i.e. create mental pictures for themselves about the way they lived together with their fellows. What ensures that these mental, fictive pictures are able to transgress the border of individual minds and become a common picture shared by all belonging to the given group? Anderson finds this factor in the cultural system of community. The members of archaic societies imagined themselves as ones who, together with their fellows, belong to a large unit bounded together with the ties of religion or conceived themselves as the co-subjects under the rule of a royal dynasty gained his legitimacy from divine sources (Anderson 1991: 12). The archaic types of imagined communities differ from the modern variant, i.e. nation, in the way they constitute themselves, or, borrowing Charles Taylor's expression, in the way they frame their own social imaginary (To this notion see Taylor 2004).

The rise of modernity was a watershed in history concerning the structure of human communities – this is a shared conviction independently from that we consent to perennialist, modernist, or symbolic theories. Economy based on capitalistic enterprise, printed book and such intellectual movements as Reformation and Enlightenment were decisive factors in this overall economic, social, cultural and political transformative process which was rightly labelled by Karl Polanyi as a *Great Transformation* (Polanyi 1957). This transformation took place in every walk of

communal and individual life. In the theory of Gellner economy was the prime mover; its requirements determined the direction and the pace of change which induced the emergence of nation-state, the more suitable political framework for capitalist economy based on social mobility, social homogenization and political egalitarianism. Nationalism, in Gellner's definition, is a political principle striving for that the extension of political framework and culturally based national unit coincide (Gellner 1983: 5). The deficiency of this modernist approach is that it is unable to give a satisfactory explanation why national feeling and national consciousness are able to manifest themselves with such high emotional temperature and why nationalism, the ideology associated with them, rouses human passions so extremely. Smith points out that such conceptions based on the motif of *homo oeconomicus* invested with calculative reason are fail to give an adequate interpretation to these phenomena:

“Why should so many millions of people respond to flags and anthems, national monuments and shrines, national festivals and commemorations? ‘Rational choice’ theory has thought to overcome this difficulty in terms of rational individualist strategies of maximizing public goods for the culturally defined populations <...> Why should so many people be prepared to fight and die for ethnic communities whose struggles seem desperate and where any public good seems continually elusive?” (Smith 1995: 39–40).

This question makes necessary a closer examination of the notion for national consciousness. Did this phenomenon exist in premodern, archaic times? No, it, presumably, did not, at least in its modern version. There was of course some kind of community consciousness which inevitably emerges when human beings are living together. There is no possible human social coexistence without a lived experience of belonging to the group. Recent investigations have confirmed that was a strong ethnical consciousness already in 12th century, at least in North-eastern Europe, albeit it is not clear to which extent was it spread among whole population of a given ethnical-cultural region (Weeda 2012: 14). But the extension of this ethnic consciousness, maintained by common traits, manners, language, ancestral myth and religious symbols, did not coincide with the borders of the polity. Kingdoms of the European Middle Ages were not political units in the modern meaning of this term; there was no abstract state with professional bureaucracy and, in virtue of lack of a horizontally dispersed unified culture, there was no an unified mass-like national consciousness which presupposes an egalitarian political structure (Gellner 1983: 8–18). The visualizations of community consciousness were different from the ones of modernity. The borders of political units were indistinct and porous (Anderson 1991: 19) the visualization of community consciousness was no possible as the construction of the image of

territorial state enclosed within contiguous borderline and depicted on political map. Social imaginary was dominated by organic metaphors and religious symbols.

The idea of organicity appeared in the metaphor of the body; it had been originated in Christian thought where the community of believers was imagined as mystical body of Christ (*mysticum corpus Christi*); this image, in the High and Late Middle Ages (Kantorowitz 1957: 207–323) was transferred to the polity, to the earthly community designating the relation of the king and his subjects. The king, according to the body metaphor, was the head and his subjects were the limbs of the political body; they together constituted an organic wholeness in which every part had its own function. This organic-functionalist picture, in the Middle Ages, prevailed the community consciousness; the sense of belonging to the community expressed itself in the picture of body. This picture precluded an egalitarian approach; every limb of the body, the body metaphor suggests, has its own role in the smooth functioning of the wholeness, but the importance of its role is not the same from the respect of the whole body (Taylor 2013: 6–7). There are, obviously, more and lesser important limbs. The other frequently used picture distinguishing three functional strata of the community – prayers (*oratores*), warriors (*bellatores*) and workers (*laboratores*) – indicates that the different kinds of sub-group consciousness existed simultaneously side by side each other in medieval society.

However, national consciousness, at least in its modern version as a mass phenomenon, did not exist. Notwithstanding the idea of *fatherland* was far from to be unknown to the man of the Middle Ages but it referred to the locality or assumed strong religious connotations. Attachment to the local, concrete *patria*, apprehensible by the bodily senses, so to say, a primordial emotion in every community; this immediately given layer of human existence is able, so to say in a natural way, to evoke strong emotions and passions when, for example, it comes its defence against enemy or natural forces. What concerns the wider, abstract, political *patria*, the motif *pro patria mori* was a well known locus in classical antiquity with strong republican flavor and associated with strong and deep feeling. The locus, after the emergence of Christianity, was transferred to perennial fatherland, viz. the Heaven for which to die was a glorious martyr's death. In the High and Late Middle Ages the notion of *patria* secularized and it began to assume the meaning of political-legal body (Kantorowitz 1957: 232–272). This process went at different pace in different countries and was embraced with the emergence of territorial state; it happened the most conspicuously way in the case of France. The territorial state was the incubator of modern nation with a unified national consciousness based on egalitarian political climate. The situation was far from to be the same in different regions of Europe; in Western Europe, first of all in England and France, national and political borders coincided, while In Central and

Eastern-Europe in the multilingual empires there were different emerging nations with their own diverging versions of national consciousness.

The rise of the modernity and nation state as a new type of imagined community

The archaic, pre-modern imagined communities were dissolved, at the dawn of modernity, by the co-agency of many factors. This happened at different times in different parts of Europe. Gellner, in this respect, rightly tells about three time zones of Europe (Gellner 1994: 113–118). Process of modernization was fostered by an array of factors: book-print, capitalism and the new ideas concerning popular sovereignty were the most important ones of them. At the same time, in the background, was going on a transformation of time and space frameworks; time and space secularized. The Christian conception of time, similarly to other mythological-religious conceptions, divided time into holy and profane spheres. Holy time had ontological priority over profane time; the former was the domain of sacrality which had regularly to enter profane time to renew it and saving the world from falling apart. Space, similarly, was conceived in the picture of concentric circles. The inner circle of the sacral centre was surrounded by the outer circles of profane space. Time and space, in modern consciousness, lost their sacral dimensions. A picture of space as a dimension as an aggregate of neutral, value free points emerged while time became conceived as a void tank full of events ensuing each other by the law of causality.

Political authorities invested by divine legitimation had been questioned, Anderson argues, and the new imagined communities imagined themselves not as community fellows connected hierarchically to a timeless religious-political centre but as co-nationals belonging to a nation which exists in a mundane simultaneous time. Membership of this modern nation is constituted by horizontal relationships. The most important constituents of modern national consciousness are *simultaneity* and *horizontality* which, in the theory of Anderson, are generated and maintained by such products of “print-capitalism” as the books and newspapers printed in vernaculars. One of the most important visualization of modern national consciousness is the map. The image of the country encircled by a contiguous borderline and distinguished from the neighboring countries even by a different color on political maps becomes some kind of logo determining the way in which the nationals visualize for themselves their nation. The map, in national consciousness, performs double function; it positions the

nation, on the one hand, among other nations and, on the other hand, designates for the individuals the extension of frame of reference for their national sentiment.

Will nation as a frame of reference of community sentiment be able to fulfill its proper function? It is one of the most challenging problems of our time. Is there any chance, seeing it from a historical perspective, that European Union will take over role of the imagined community from nation? Can it be function as a crystallization point of wider community consciousness replacing national consciousness? It seems to be improbable, Smith suggests, giving a pessimistic opinion concerning the chances of the EU for converting into a common Fatherland evoking deep emotions and gaining a patriotic allegiance:

“Without shared memories and meanings, without common symbols and myth, without shrines and ceremonies and monuments, except the bitter reminders of recent holocausts and wars, who will feel European in the depths of their being, and who will willingly sacrifice themselves for so abstract and ideal? In short, who will die for Europe?” (Smith 1995: 139).

Nation, Manuel Castells argues, (Castells 1997: 27–60) remains an important supplier of identity and meaning in the network society, albeit, in his opinion, the nation will be visualized as a community of shared language and common culture and the picture of nation as a territorial unit with distinct borders will fade because of integrative process fostered by new communication technologies.

The Hungarian case

State and nation are different phenomena but their history has been intertwined from the outset. Hugh Seton-Watson distinguishes old and new nations. Old nations, in his theory, having possessed their own states since the Middle Ages, while the new ones created it after the emergence of nationalism using this doctrine as an intellectual weapon for achieving their aim. In the case of old nations national consciousness took shape during a spontaneous slow process while in the case of the new ones it was a political artifact coming into being by the conscious efforts of intelligentsia; linguistics, ethnographers, historians and teachers. This happened in Central and Eastern Europe from the beginning of the 19th century (Seton-Watson 1977). Language, in these regions, became the most important crystallization point of national consciousness; nation was imagined in the picture of a community of native speakers. It was true in case of the Hungarian nation which, according to Seton-Watson's aforementioned typology, was an old nation possessing its own state until the 15th century

but later the Hungarian kingship fell apart because of the Turkish conquest and its territories merged in the Turkish and Habsburg Empires.

Albeit the parts of the former Hungarian kingship which came to the Habsburg Empire preserved their political institutions; they had their own Diet of Estate and county self government, Hungarian nation, similarly to other Central and Eastern-European nations, had been re-established in the 19th century. Language here, as well as, was the main constituent factor of emerging modern national consciousness. In this respect the slogan of Hungarian noble origin reformers of the 19th century was symptomatic: 'Nation exists in its language' This conception foreshadowed the later conflicts because the old political unit, the territory of the Medieval Hungarian Kingship, which in the emerging Hungarian national consciousness appeared as an ancient Hungarian land, was a mixed region in ethnical and linguistic meaning; it was populated by different ethnic groups with different languages.

István Bibó, one of the most important Hungarian political thinkers of the 20th century, and an outspoken analyst of the pathological distortions of Hungarian national consciousness, points out that the pictorial representation of the nation as a territorial-geographical-political unit surrounded by contiguous red line on the map springs from a basically possessive outlook identifying national community with the territories it possesses or wish to possess (Bibó 1990: 399). The prosperity of the nation is exclusively associated with its geographical-spatial extension which appears either as a source of pride or that of deep frustration – it depends on the momentarily existing situation. It has been a typical Central and Eastern European since the 19th century, Bibó argues.

In Hungary the visualization of nation as an imagined community in the form a territorial unity, albeit the country joined the EU in 2004, surrounded by borderline seems to have got new popularity with wider segments of population at the latest times. What makes the phenomenon more interesting, it is that the map of the country as a *logo* on the posters or stickers stuck on cars or signboards depicts not the present country but the historical Greater Hungary ceased to exist after the First World War because of the Trianon Treaty imposed on the country by the victorious powers in 1920. So, in this case the logo depicts a former geographical-political extension of the country visualized as a dream picture never can be realized again.

In a nutshell it can be said that Hungarian national consciousness has been prevailed by fragments borrowed from the different phases of Hungarian history. The Crown of Saint Stephen, the first, state-founding Hungarian king which in the Middle Ages condensed the idea of the unity of the king and his subjects in an corporative and organic picture gets on well with the vision of ancient

Hungarian pre-Christian shamanistic religion which had been extirpated by the above mentioned king, Saint Stephen. This mixture has been supplemented with the idea Hungarian nation as an ethnical-linguistic community standing in stark contrast with the picture of the historical Greater Hungary because it was a characteristically premodern archaic multiethnic and multilingual empire. Moreover, it can be found in Hungarian national consciousness the picture of the rebellion Hungarian nation as a political community rebelled against the communist tyranny in the revolution of 1956. Strangely, this picture coexists with the vision of Hungary which always sought for the possibilities of a bargain with the oppressive political powers from the Habsburg monarchy after the lost revolution of 1848 to the communist regime of János Kádár after a second lost revolution in 1956.

Conclusions

What happens to the visualization of the nation as a territorial unit in the age of globalization? It was a widely shared conviction, in the enthusiastic mood of the 1990s, according to which the image of the territorial state would fade out in national fancy. Having seen the events of the latest decade this opinion seems to be hasty; what is going on, contrary to the former prognoses about the weakening of national allegiance and the fall of nation-states, is some kind of ethno-national revival. A double process has been emerging; it is an undeniable fact, on the one hand, the process of economic and cultural globalization taking ground at an accelerating pace, while, on the other hand, the strengthening of national consciousness is running up in many zones of the globalized world which, in cultural and political meaning, are enormously differ from each other. Visualizations of national consciousness blend into each other archaic, modern and postmodern elements and a hybrid mental image of nation has been emerging in the latest period. However, national consciousness constitutes a basic form of communal identity for the time being and remains presumably in this role in the foreseeable future as well.

References

1. Anderson, B. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.
2. Bibó, I. 1990. *Válogatott tanulmányok (1935–1944)*. Vol. 1. Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó.
3. Castells, M. 1997. *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. II. The Power of Identity. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
4. Gellner, E. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basic Blackwell.

5. Gellner, E. 1994. *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
6. Kantorowicz, E. H. 1957. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press.
7. Polanyi, K. 1957. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press.
8. Seton-Watson, H. 1977. *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*. London: Methuen.
9. Smith, A. D. 1983. *Theories of Nationalism*. New York, NY: Holmes & Meier.
10. Smith, A. D. 1995. *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
11. Taylor, Ch. 2004. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
12. Taylor, Ch. 2013. *On Social Imaginary*. Available from Internet: <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/swiss/archive/Taylor.pdf>. Last access: 2013-09-09.
13. Weeda, C. 2012. *Images in Ethnicity in Later Medieval Europe*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Amsterdam. Faculty of Humanities. Available from Internet: <http://dare.uva.nl/document/445120>. Last access: 2013-09-09.